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# STATISTICAL REPORTING ON HIGH SEAS FISHERIES

Submitted by the delegation of the United States of America

## INTRODUCTION

1. In 1991, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Committee on Fisheries requested FAO to study the feasibility of reporting catches from high seas fisheries. Such reporting was requested in order to differentiate catches taken in areas under national jurisdiction from those taken on the high seas. The general intent of such reporting was to assess the impact of such fishing and to support the conservation of the world's living resources.

2. Most national reporting authorities either do not collect data by area of capture or, if they do, do not submit the data in that format to any international or regional fishery commission. At present, reporting by national authorities to FAO is submitted via the 52 FAO statistical areas, which were not designed to coincide with national boundaries. This paper presents for discussion several statistical issues that must be resolved in order to obtain comprehensive and accurate data for the high seas areas.

## I. REPORTING OF EXISTING DATA

3. At the 15th FAO Coordinated Working Party on Atlantic Fishery Statistics (8-14 July 1992, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia), several participants expressed the opinion that some national reporting authorities may already be collecting data at the level of detail necessary to differentiate high seas catches. The problem consists in the fact that, prior to submission to FAO, the data are aggregated by the reporting authority to the FAO statistical areas, resulting in a loss of detail.

4. For example, various reporting requirements for national or regional commission data collection purposes record catches by 1- or 5-degree squares of latitude and longitude. In such cases, the data could be transformed into high seas statistical areas (discussed below) with the use of computer software, possibly utilizing one of the many commercially available Geographic Information System (GIS) packages. Once the high seas areas are defined, the GIS software could take International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) or Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) tuna data by 1- or 5-degree squares and partition it into high seas or exclusive economic zone (EEZ) areas. Since tuna are currently the predominant high seas species, the majority of data reporting by high seas areas could be accomplished readily, at least from a technical standpoint.

## II. THE CURRENT SITUATION WITH UNITED STATES FLAG VESSELS

5. The United States has only limited data on all fishing activities by its flag vessels outside its own EEZ. Fishing by United States vessels in another nation's EEZ or on the high seas may go unrecorded by the United States Government statistics offices because there is no comprehensive statutory authority regarding the submission of fishery statistics by these vessels. Rather, individual fishery conventions or treaties to which the United States is a party define the reporting requirements for participants which are implemented, in turn, through the United States Code of Federal Regulations (e.g., regulations of ICCAT and IATTC).

6. The problem of fishery statistics on American flag vessels in another nation's EEZ could be improved through the cooperative exchange of data between the host nation and the flag nation. Most often, access to the foreign nation's EEZ is conditioned by the use of fishery observers and/or logbook reporting requirements. Data submitted to the host nation should be made accessible to the fishery authority of the flag nation which reports to FAO. This would serve at least two purposes: it would identify the extent of the flag nation's distant-water fleet and its potential capacity, and it would help to alleviate duplicative reporting to FAO of catches which are sometimes submitted by both the flag nation and the host nation. The role of FAO in coordinating the exchange of data between nations could become a considerable burden.

7. Additional measures to improve data coverage are available when United States flag vessels return home from outside United States EEZ waters with catch still on board (i.e., not transferred at sea or landed at foreign ports). Many individual States have landing laws which require the submission of data regardless of the jurisdiction of capture. Efforts could be undertaken with these States to modify their landing laws to differentiate catches by area where this is not currently the practice. At the Federal level, if the species on board upon return to the United States EEZ relate to management of species under the Magnuson Act Fishery Management Plans, then Federal regulations could require reporting of fish on board upon entry into the United States EEZ.

8. In the case of true high seas fisheries, unless there is a specific convention or treaty, the United States has no reporting mechanism to track the catches of American flag vessels in these waters. Even where regional fisheries organizations exist, the United States may not be a contracting party. Thus,

while regional commissions may serve a coordinating role in the compilation of high seas data for certain species, such an approach will not work where a large percentage of the catch is taken by non-contracting parties. In practice, therefore, it is suggested not only that FAO continue its liaison with regional commissions for high seas data on certain species, but also that it initiate direct consultations with high seas fishing nations for the submission of data for all species taken on the high seas. This assumes that there would be some legal authority by which national statistics offices could require the submission of data.

9. Any recommendation by FAO for national reporting of high seas catches should recognize such an assumption. Moreover, strong international consensus is needed to prove that there is a compelling need for these data. Only then would a national statistics office seek an international (perhaps the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, art. 119, para. 2) 1/ or national authority to help implement a high seas reporting mechanism.

## III. THE ROLE OF FAO

10. Owing to its existing contacts and relationships with national reporting authorities and regional fishery commissions, FAO is the logical choice for coordinating the compilation and dissemination of high seas fisheries data. The integration of data from various sources is a formidable task, and the FAO Coordinated Working Party approach has proved a successful forum for the promotion of uniform reporting standards and reconciliation of data problems. In undertaking the task of gathering and reporting high seas fishery data, FAO should consider the extension of the Coordinated Working Party approach beyond its current focus on Atlantic fisheries reporting issues.

11. The problems inherent in existing national reporting systems will be more apparent in any future high seas reporting system. Issues of non-response, validation of self-reported data, flags of convenience, transshipments, landings in foreign ports and processing at sea will influence the completeness and accuracy of the data. FAO can serve as a source of information on how different national reporting authorities handle these issues and develop recommendations from participating nations for inclusion in the FAO Handbook of Fishery Statistics. This could include an assessment of the use of statistical sampling of representative vessels, the deployment of fishery observers for the validation of logbook data and the direct recording of by-catch and discard data.

## IV. DATA CONFIDENTIALITY

12. One issue to be resolved in any approach to the differentiation of catches into high seas and EEZ areas is data confidentiality. Publication of data by individual country EEZ could reveal sensitive economic data which, in the case of some nations, could compromise negotiations for access rights to national EEZs. FAO should conduct an evaluation of this issue to examine how widespread such a concern is, and whether its significance would override the successful implementation of a high seas reporting system.

## V. ESTABLISHMENT OF HIGH SEAS REPORTING AREAS

13. FAO and others have already mapped areas of the world's oceans not covered by species authorities or regional commissions. Overlaid with the current national EEZ boundaries, the geographic scope of high seas reporting areas becomes clear. Since it is impossible to predict all the uses of the reported high seas fishery data, it is recommended for reporting purposes that a latitude- and longitude-based grid system be implemented. If absolutely necessary, the resolution of reporting could even vary between strata (e.g., by fishery, time and nation) and still be compatible at aggregated levels.

14. There are many benefits of a geo-reference grid system. Computer software could automatically match catch and effort records to the grid system without need for recoding. Once keyed to geo-reference points, the data could be summarized by regional commission area, large marine ecosystem or any variety of aggregations for analysis. For example, physical and environmental data on the oceans obtained by shipboard and satellite platforms could be easily integrated with the catch data base for ecosystems modelling and stock assessment. In addition, overlays of fishing effort by gear types with migratory paths of marine mammals or shipping lanes may help reduce adverse interactions.

## VI. SCOPE OF HIGH SEAS DATA SUBMISSION

15. For purposes of discussion, the minimum set of data for high seas reporting should include: annual catch by species by gear, by 5-degree square in areas outside national EEZs, in volume (metric tons) and value at point of first sale.

## Notes

1/ "2. Available scientific information, catch and fishing effort statistics, and other data relevant to conservation of fish stocks shall be contributed and exchanged on a regular basis through competent international organizations, whether subregional, regional or global, where appropriate and with participation by all States concerned."

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